

Move Like a Kid Again

Most advice about exercise focuses on doing more, pushing harder, or staying consistent, which works until it starts to feel like another obligation. Movement does not have to look like a workout to count, and some of the most effective ways to get your body moving are the ones most of us allow ourselves to grow out of, which is such a shame!

Skipping, jumping rope, hula hooping, and even something like using a swing all do more than just “burn calories.” They bring in coordination, rhythm, and full-body movement in a way that walking or standard workouts often do not. That combination changes how your body moves, not just how hard it works, which is part of why these feel different and often easier to come back to.

Here are a few worth revisiting.

Skipping

Skipping looks simple, but it combines balance, coordination, and light impact, which means your muscles and your nervous system are working at the same time. That carries over into how you move through everyday life, not just during exercise.

Because it alternates legs and includes a small hop, it also builds joint stability, especially around the ankles and knees. That alternating pattern trains your body to absorb and redistribute force from one side to the other, which is something walking does less of and many workouts isolate rather than integrate. Skipping also has a natural “bounce” that uses elastic energy through your tendons, which can improve efficiency and reduce how much effort each step takes over time. It’s also, well, fun. And that is not trivial, because enjoyment is one of the strongest predictors of whether you keep doing something. The movement is rhythmic and just engaging enough to pull you out of autopilot, which is part of why it often feels more engaging than steady walking or jogging.

There is a right way to do it if you want it to feel good on your joints. The goal is a

light, springy landing rather than a heavy one, keeping the hops low and controlled so the impact stays manageable. Most of the work should come from your lower legs and ankles, not from driving hard through your knees.

Easy ways to try it:

- Skip for part of a walk instead of walking the entire time
- Alternate one minute of skipping with a few minutes of walking
- Keep your hops low and land softly under your body, not out in front
- Stay tall through your torso and let your arms swing naturally
- Use smooth, even ground to reduce unnecessary strain on your joints



Jumping rope

Jump roping is one of the fastest ways to raise your heart rate without needing much time or space, since it brings together timing, coordination, and cardiovascular effort in a way that adds up quickly even in short intervals. It also adds impact in a controlled way, which supports bone health over time, something that becomes more important with age and is often missing from lower-intensity routines.

You also do not need anything fancy to get started. A basic rope is enough, and many solid options cost under \$10, especially the simple speed ropes you can find online or at most sporting goods stores. What matters more is getting the right fit, since rope length has a direct effect on how smooth the movement feels and whether you are constantly catching the rope.

The easiest way to size it is to stand on the middle of the rope and pull the handles straight up so they reach about your armpits or mid-chest, which gives you enough clearance without excess slack. Most ropes are adjustable, so you can shorten them by sliding or trimming the cord until it feels right, which is worth taking a minute to do since even a small adjustment changes how usable it is.

Easy ways to try it:

- Do 30 seconds on, 30 seconds off for a few rounds
- Add a few minutes after a walk while you are already outside
- Keep a rope by the door so it is easy to grab
- Choose a simple adjustable rope instead of overthinking features
- Stand on the rope and adjust so the handles reach your armpits



Hula hooping

Hula hooping shifts the focus to your core and hips, with a steady, circular motion that keeps your body engaged without feeling intense. That continuous rotation requires your core muscles to stay active the entire time, which is why people often notice their abs tightening up once they get the hang of it, while your hips move through a range of motion that most people do not use much during the day, especially if they spend a lot of time sitting.

Because the movement is smooth and sustained rather than stop-and-start, it builds muscular endurance through the midsection while also improving coordination and control. It also encourages a more relaxed breathing pattern compared to higher-intensity exercise, which makes it easier to keep going for longer periods without feeling fatigued.

The setup matters more than people expect. Many of the hoops sold for kids are too small and too light, which makes them harder to control and more frustrating to use. A larger, slightly heavier hoop moves more slowly and gives you more time to find the rhythm, which makes the learning curve much more manageable.

You also do not need to force a perfect circular motion. Moving your hips forward and back works just as well and is often easier to start with, especially while you are figuring out the timing.

Easy ways to try it:

- Start with a few minutes and build gradually as you get more comfortable
- Use a larger, slightly weighted hoop to make it easier to control
- Try a front-to-back motion first if the circular movement feels awkward
- Keep your movements small and controlled rather than exaggerated
- Try it with music to help maintain a steady pace



Swinging (playground swings)

This is more than just sitting and moving back and forth. Pumping your legs to build momentum engages your core, hips, and upper body, and the repeated extension and flexion through the hips is something most people do not get much of during the day. It also creates a gentle, rhythmic motion that can feel surprisingly restorative, especially if most of your day is spent sitting.

The one practical barrier is equipment size. Standard playground swings can feel tight or unstable for adults, but many parks now have larger or flat-seat swings with longer chains that sit higher off the ground. Look for swings where the top bar is at least about 7.5 to 8 feet high, which usually means the chains are long enough for you to extend your legs comfortably and actually build momentum without feeling cramped.

Easy ways to try it:

- Add a few minutes of swinging at the end of a walk
- Focus on building momentum using your legs and core rather than just drifting
- Look for parks with longer chains or larger seats



Balancing (curbs, edges, uneven ground)

Balancing is one of the first things people stop doing, but it plays a direct role in coordination, joint stability, and preventing falls. Walking along a curb or a low edge forces your body to make constant small adjustments through your ankles, knees, and hips, which keeps those stabilizing muscles active instead of letting them go quiet.

Those small corrections also train your nervous system to react more quickly and accurately, which carries over into everyday situations where the ground is uneven or your footing is not perfect. That connection is easy to overlook, but balance is closely tied to fall risk, which means it also ties directly to injuries like fractures that can have much bigger consequences over time.

This type of movement does not feel intense, but it builds control in a very specific way that standard exercise often misses. It also brings your attention into the movement, since you have to stay just focused enough to stay on the edge without overthinking it. When you are on uneven ground, it is worth being a little more deliberate about your footing and wearing shoes with a stable base and good traction, since that gives you better feedback and reduces the chance of slipping.

Easy ways to try it:

- Walk along a curb or low edge for short stretches during a walk
- Step onto grass, gravel, or uneven paths for part of your route
- Slow down slightly so your body has to stabilize rather than just move through
- Keep your gaze forward instead of looking down at your feet



Side-to-side movement (shuffling, lateral steps)

Most adult movement stays in a straight line, which means the muscles that control side-to-side motion do not get much use. Shuffling or stepping laterally brings in the hips, especially the outer hip muscles that help stabilize your pelvis when you walk, climb stairs, or shift direction.

Those muscles do more than you may realize. They help keep your knees tracking properly and reduce excess strain through the joints, which becomes more noticeable when they are weak or underused. Bringing them back into the mix helps round out how your body moves, rather than reinforcing the same forward pattern over and over.

This type of movement also challenges coordination in a different way. Moving sideways is less familiar, so your body has to pay more attention to where it is in space, which adds a layer of control that you do not get from walking alone.

Easy ways to try it:

- Add short side-step intervals during a walk
- Move side-to-side across a driveway or open space for 30–60 seconds
- Stay low and controlled rather than bouncing
- Keep your feet parallel and avoid crossing over



When you move like this, something pretty amazing happens: it brings you back into the moment. Most adult movement is repetitive and predictable. You can do it while thinking about ten other things. This is different, because you have to pay just enough attention to what you're doing so that your mind follows your body. And there is something familiar, maybe nostalgic about it. Moving this way can bring back a special feeling of being a kid, when movement was natural, a little messy, and actually fun. That sense of being a bit more free and less self-conscious brings an extra touch of joy and delight.

You're still doing something good for your body. It just feels better while you are doing it.

A “recipe” for fun and fitness

If you want a simple way to put this into practice, try this once today:

- 1 minute skipping
- 1 minute walking
- 30 seconds jump rope
- 30 seconds rest
- 2 minutes hula hooping
- 2 minutes walking or swinging
- 1 minute balancing (curb or edge)
- 1 minute side-to-side movement

Repeat or adjust based on how it feels. This is not about doing it perfectly. It is about mixing movement in a way that feels different from a typical workout and seeing what you actually enjoy.